Mind Sports Olympiad moves to bigger venue

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The annual Mind Sports Olympiad has been confirmed for London, August 20-28, and is moving to a slightly bigger venue, University of Central London, Malet Street, after last year's disappointing turn out. This will be the 15th year the event has run, and is already attracting players from Europe and the United States, mostly the die-hard gamesters who have supported it over the past few rocky years.

The first four Mind Sports were truly spectacular events, beginning with the 1997 launch at the Royal Festival Hall, and three equally impressive follow ups which took up substantial space at the Novotel Hotel, Hammersmith; Kensington Olympia; and then Alexandra Palace in North London, but the 5th event was a low key affair held at the South Bank University, and was only saved from oblivion by the inclusion of a strong chess contingent from India when the Commonwealth Championship was incorporated with the Ron Banwell Masters.

In 2002, MSO moved north to Loughborough University, followed by two years at the campus of University of Manchester (UMIST) before moving south again.

The main reasons for the downturn in its fortunes were a falling out of the organisers and protracted legal problems. Although the latter were resolved, the event never recovered, and it was only by a supreme collective effort that it didn't fall to pieces after its temporary relocation to Manchester.

The Mind Sports was the brainchild of chess player David Levy; although he has not played competitively for many years, Levy is an international master, prolific author of chess books and articles, and has done pioneering work on chess programming and in

related fields. Sadly, his original vision, which was conceived as early as 1987 and was ten years in the making, never quite came to fruition, and for no fault of his own.

The actual events have been run since 1997 by Tony Corfe and a small team of mostly volunteers. Corfe is a big name on the chess circuit, and is well known as a tournament organiser as well as a supplier of chess paraphernalia. He will be in charge again this year, and his schedule includes a new Abstract Games in addition to the regulars of chess, Abalone, backgammon, Diplomacy, draughts, Go, Entropy, Lost Cities, Scrabble, and a collection of poker tournaments played strictly for medals and fun.

Last year, Paco de la Banda of Spain won the Pentamind Championship, and Andres Kuusk won the first gold medal ever to be awarded to Estonia.

[The above article first published May 4, 2011 (UK time), not May 3 as shown by the archived version. The dude with the beard is Tony Corfe.]